

Subjective Space and Imaginary Ownership:
Seoul in Modern Korean Literature

by

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Abstract

I analyze the space of Seoul, South Korea of three short stories of Korean modern literature of the 20th and 21st century in relation to the physical space of the capital and the subjectivity of the characters. These three short stories are as follows: Yi Sang's "The Wings" (1932) which is set contemporarily in the Japan-colonized Korea, Kim Sŭng-ok's "Seoul: 1964, Winter" (1965) during the revolutionary time after the April Revolution and coup staged by Park Chung-hee and the promise of a liberalism in the developing space, and Kim Yŏng-ha's "Moving" (2010) which functions in the modern-day situation of real-estate speculation which I read as the ultimate fetishization of space. With previous interpretations of the texts as well as historical context, I analyze the three stories as critiques of capitalism in the relationship of space to subjectivism and the fetishization of space as the fetishization of production as opposed to product positioned in Marxism.

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“...these classes (middle classes) find what they seek – namely, a mirror of their 'reality', tranquilizing ideas, and the image of a social world in which they have their own specially labeled, guaranteed place. The truth is, however, that this space manipulates them, along with their unclear aspirations and their all-too-clear needs.” - Henri Lefebvre *The Production of Space*

Key terms: space, subjectivity, capitalism, movement, modernity

INTRODUCTION: SPACE AND SUBJECTIVITY

A colonial intellectual with Western education withdraws to the private space of his home and idles away his days in speculation, while his wife sells her charms to male clients on the other side of the divided room. Three strangers meet by chance at a liquor stall and spend a winter night wandering through the city, at the end of which one of the men commits suicide. An upwardly mobile couple achieves their long-held dream of moving to a bigger apartment, only to find that the process leaves them estranged from the very objects and spaces that secure their sense of ownership. The three stories summarized above, as is clear from even this brief characterization, turn the anxieties of the modern subject into spatial relations, against the backdrop of the city of Seoul at pivotal points in modern Korean history: the Japanese rule of the 1930s, the period following the April Revolution of 1960 and the May Coup of 1961, and the neoliberal reorganization of Korean political economy in the early 2000s, following the Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s. This thesis is an exploration of the city of Seoul as it comes to life in relation to modernity and subjectivity in three canonical works of modern Korean fiction: Yi Sang’s “The Wings” (1936), Kim Sŭng-ok’s “Seoul: 1964, Winter” (1965), and Kim Yŏng-ha’s “Moving” (2004).

Mindful of Henri Lefebvre’s insight that “space is not a thing but rather a set of relations” (Lefebvre 83), I do not take the urban space the three stories produce for granted as an

objective reality that exists independently. Rather, I understand the city, following Anthony Vidler, as a subjective experience. In *Warped Space*, Anthony Vidler discusses how space has been “increasingly defined as a product of subjective project and introjection, as opposed to a stable container of objects and bodies” (Vidler 1). Such an understanding of space emerged in the nineteenth-century European context of developments in technology, industrialization, and psychology. One of the most famous theorists of subjective space was the German philosopher Martin Heidegger who argued that the emergence of man as *subiectum* and the world as “picture” was what defined the modern age as such. In “The Age of the World Picture,” Heidegger located the phenomenon in which phrases this new art and position of the viewer: “That means that the art work becomes the object of mere subjective experience...” (116). Coupled with this was an expansion of the auditory senses with the telephone, phonograph, radio and video.

“Man becomes the relational center...” (128) at the heart of modern experience. Man in the Middle Ages came into being as a “creation”; to exist meant to take up a ranked place in an order already created by “Creator-God” (129). The modern man, in contrast, occupies the “position in which he can be that particular being who gives the measure and draws up the guidelines for everything that is” (133), the very ground and reference point for everything. Man’s emergence as a subject in this sense, however, depends on the objectification of the world. The world becomes a picture, that is to say, a representation by and for the subject. The awareness of the visual but also the distrust that this visual experience is the same for all individuals in all areas of the world. The modern age is the age of humanism more than any other. Humans are both the producers and consumers of all of culture and therefore become the

center of the world in creating the space that surrounds. This happens with the transition of the purpose of science and the center role that the individual plays as a researcher. Along with the industrial economy that increases the speed of production and encourages endless consumption like a conveyor belt that doesn't rest, science becomes research-based which encourages “ongoing activity” which “forms men of a different stamp” - men with ceaseless but purposeful activity (Heidegger 125). Purposeful in the sense that the activity is done with the expectation of improvement, whether collective or individual.

There is made mention of motion in “The Age of the World Picture” and certainly movement is important when considering the “ongoing activity” of the modern individual. Activity necessarily means movement and the expelling of energy and research is described as dependent upon the physical world. However, variance of motion is not differentiated in value: “No motion or direction of motion is superior to any other. Every place is equal to every other” (Heidegger 119). This statement is impossible in consideration of the larger argument Heidegger makes. Research as physical movement may be directionless because the final result is unclear, but it is certainly not purposeless. Research depends upon a hypothesis which is then verified or falsified even if the hypothesis is stated with trepidation. Even if not stated out-right, there is an implicit purpose within the activity. Though a man may wander in a park without an end goal in mind, he goes with the assumption that the walk may relax him, or he may feel calm at the sight of nature, or even for the sole purpose of physical movement. There is always purpose in no direction just by the logic that the purpose is having no direction.

Therefore, movement is more important in the development of establishing personal perspective in the subjective modern world than the visual. In order to establish this subjectivity,

the differentiation of subject (the individual) from object (both inanimate and other individuals) occurs in the spatiotemporal and their relation to each other in terms of motion (Heidegger 119).

I theorize that this division can occur at the basic visual level by the subject, but this visual differentiation is meaningless if they cannot interact with the objects around them. It is only through physical movement that actions can occur and only through actions can the subject control space, thereby taking up the center position necessary as an individual. Without movement in space, the subject is no different from an object and only waits to be acted upon by the will of other subjects.

The three works of Korean fiction analyzed in this thesis dramatize the fundamental splitting of man-as-subject and world-as-picture that Heidegger theorized. How to emerge as a center of all relations and a subject of action over and against the world is the central question that unites the three works. This question, however, is haunted by persistent threats of loss of subjectivity. And these threats, in turn, have relationships to specific configurations of political economy at different historical periods in modern Korea—colonial modernity, revolution and reaction, and late capitalism or neoliberal globalization. In the pages that follow, I explore three striking instances of spatialization of Seoul in modern Korean literature according to what Vidler calls the “aesthetics of uncertainty and movement and a psychology of anxiety, whether nostalgically melancholic or progressively anticipatory” (Vidler 3).

YI SANG'S “THE WINGS”: RECONSTITUTING SUBJECTIVITY IN A COLONIAL CAPITAL

“The Wings,” written by Yi Sang in 1936, is a short story that takes place in the colonial capital of Seoul under Japanese rule. Told through the point-of-view of a child-like man who

cloisters himself in the dark back-half of a partitioned room while his wife receives male clients in the front half, the short story has long been hailed as the modernist work *par excellence* for its manipulation of language and problematization of gender relations. For Ch'oe Chaesŏ (1908-1964), a contemporary of Yi Sang's and prominent literary critic who reviewed the story in *Chosŏn ilbo*, Yi Sang's experimentation with language and form was to be applauded for "revolutionizing Korean narrative" (Poole 43-44). At the same time, the work's novel preoccupation with form invited charges that Yi Sang's craft was divorced from the political reality of Koreans under colonial rule. Isolated from the body of literature known as *minjok munhak*, whose urgent task was tied to the articulation of a suppressed national identity, Yi Sang's work came to be read in two mutually exclusive veins: "for Yi's attention to literary language, and ones that reads for history, or its absence, in the content of the fiction" (Hanscom 142).

This opposition between language and history in existing scholarship on Yi Sang, however, has been challenged by Henry Em. Calling for "The Wings" to be read not as divorced from *minjok munhak*, but rather as a work extremely cognizant of the colonial situation, Em argues that the story uses "...the language of a dismembered, colonized discourse, incapable of communication directly" in order precisely to criticize colonialism. Though it is told in the first-person, the "I" form, rather than signaling the story's "private" nature, should be read instead as an "ironic device used to draw attention to suppression, indeed destruction, of the autonomous subject in colonial Korea" (Em 53-54). Moreover, this de-centering of the subject occurs under the capitalist system and the logic of commodification which calls for constant production and improvements in efficiency (Em 51). In this way, the text can be read as making an aesthetic

statement that is at the same time thoroughly political—a statement against the workings “of the kind of modernity imposed by the conquering West/Japan” and capitalism (Em 52).

Taking my cue from Em’s call to read Yi Sang’s aesthetic experimentation as a critique of political economy, I explore how the dilemma of colonial-modern subjectivity becomes spatialized in “The Wings.” Through the narrative of a man who grasps at chances to gain his subjectivity as an intellectual in the colonial modern space of Seoul but ultimately fails to navigate his way through its contradictions, Yi Sang’s work presents both a critique of the prescribed colonial modernity and the capitalist logic that dictated the urban forms of Seoul. In developing this reading of “The Wings,” I draw upon Yi-fu Tuan’s theorization of how subjectivity is established in relation to space in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Like the infant that first learns to orient itself in space in Tuan’s analysis, the narrator progresses in his spatial development throughout the story, but his evolving perspective does not go further than that of a young child’s; failing to understand the importance of *property*, he cannot navigate the spaces of the colonial-modern capital that lie outside the small square-footage of his darkened room. His failures, in turn, defamiliarize the organizational logic of the city that has undergone modernization as a colonial capital.

Lasting over three decades from 1910 to 1945, Japanese colonization of Korea expedited the modernization of the city of Seoul begun at the turn of the century by Korea’s last sovereign monarch, but in a highly uneven manner. As Todd Henry has analyzed, the development of Seoul, pursued along the lines that reinscribed the ethnic and class difference between the colonizer and the colonized, created a city where newly erected movie theaters and department stores lined broad boulevards, while serpentine back alleys opened on to older, traditional spaces

such as the Korean marketplace. The result of colonial modernization according to Henry, was “a multilayered built environment, characterized by unlikely juxtapositions of old and new, neglect and excess, and chaos and order” (22). The juxtaposition, however, was not arbitrary as an obvious division existed in spatial hierarchy between the native Koreans and Japanese colonizers. The landscape of Seoul was manipulated and changed to weaken Korean nationalism and exercise colonial power over the space. One notable site in this regard was desecrated was the Kyōngbok Palace, the residence of the king during the Chosŏn dynasty from 1392 to 1909 (Jin 40). This demolition of the Palace and urban redevelopment of the city under the Urban Improvement Ordinance of 1912 was an attempt to make Koreans subservient to Japanese power; “...the demolition of Kyōngbok Palace and its gate, Kwanghwamun, became an effective rhetorical device, symbolizing the fatal downfall of the Chosŏn dynasty by utterly denying the inherited symbolic geography, *p'ungsu*, and severing the flow of authority believed to come from the sacred natural landscape” (Jin 41).

If the demolition of Kyōngbok Palace represented a symbolic and rhetorical reordering of the public space designed to exhibit colonial power, the urban development introduced by the colonial government also affected all Koreans on an individual level. In “The Wings,” we see this development in the shape of the types of places frequented by the narrator when he makes his trips to the outside world. These places have sights and sounds that are familiar to him—the trains of Gyeongsang station sound “More familiar and intimate to me than Mozart”—but also distant-- “The names of the foods looked as remote to me as the names of my early childhood friends” (Yi 31). This remoteness becomes the most discomfiting when the station café closes its doors at the end of the day and he leaves in disorientation: “...at the moment I stepped into the

station building, I suddenly recalled that there was not even a single penny in my pocket. I felt dizzy. I was at a loss, faltering before the building, roaming here and there like a haunted person” (Yi 38). Without money in his pocket, he has no purpose for being in the space and feels this unwelcome physically.

The narrator's forays into the outside world, however, are brief. He spends most days instead in a small, cave-like back-half of a partitioned room to which he retreats, away from the public space of the colonial capital and the social identity that he would need to navigate the space. On the other side of this partition, in the other half of the room that is awash in bright light since it has a window and an entrance, the narrator's wife makes a living as a prostitute. Though a grown man with Western education, he remains willfully ignorant of this fact. In fact, his ignorance makes him appear child-like, as does his strange relationship with his wife—a maternal figure and caregiver in charge of the space of the home and therefore the center of his compass, and at the same time, the breadwinner and the couple's “public face.” It is in such a domestic space, then, that the narrator of “The Wings” seeks to reconstitute his subjectivity, but in the most fundamental way, like a child first learning to orient himself and move his body in space. This privatized and infantile reconstitution of subjectivity, however, does not lead to the restoration of a sense of agency in the public, and the failure ultimately opens up a space of critique about the political economy of colonial Seoul.

The story begins in the protective interior of the narrator's home called House No. 33, presumably a brothel in which single rooms encircle a shared courtyard. His home's walls function as the outer limits to his known world; he experiences the outside world is through the beginning senses of sound and smell by hearing the movements and actions of his neighbors and

the meals they cook. The knowledge of the exterior world reaches him through the senses of sight, sound and smell only: he sees the residents' lights on at night, he hears the sound of the doors opening and closing and smells "roasting fish, the smell of waste water, the smell of soap..." (Yi 9-10). His perspective of space is based heavily on the visual information of what is right before him - the differences between the separate compartments of his wife and himself - due to his lack of dynamic physical movement in the space. All day he stays and rests in his house, his prostrate horizontal perspective is broken only when he goes over to his wife's half of the room in her absence. Sunny, colorful, and full of wondrous things like perfume bottles and hanging robes, his wife's room is a completely opposite sensory experience from his dark, small and unadorned chamber. bedroom full of perfume bottles and hanging robes - very much unlike his dark, small and unadorned chamber. The narrator lives cut off from the outside world: "I play with nobody, nor do I ever say hello to anybody" (Yi 10). The language he uses is very much that of a child; he *plays* with nobody, and he "thanked [his] room all the time because it seemed to maintain itself to please [him]", and "played meekly like a good boy" (11, 14).

Confining a grown man to the basic level of sensory experience leaves him no better than an infant. According to Yi-fu Tuan, the infant's world is not localized in space – they do not fully grasp from what direction or location the sensations they feel come from (Tuan 20). This is also due to the fact that the infant does not fully grasp the concept of her own body but is beginning to explore her corporal being through sensory experience such as touching her feet and reaching to put them in her mouth. In this stage of child development, the caregiver is the center of the world for the infant and the spatial experience is at first limited to understanding horizontal space and vertical space in relation to the caregiver: laying flat on her back or stomach or being lifted

in someone's arms. Also unique to this beginning stage of spatial development is the positioning of the caregiver as the focal point to judge all distances subsequently measured in relation to this personage (Tuan 29). Verticality is first understood in the caregiver's arms and the understanding of distance established in how far away the caregiver is; because the infant cannot physically navigate the space on her own, she cries when her caregiver is out of her vision. Space has not yet developed its physical quality that comes with *movement*. Without being able to move in space, the child cannot recognize herself in the position of a subject.

Like the infant in Tuan's analysis, the narrator of "The Wings" begins to first experience differentiate space and widen his perspective through the feeling of polar opposites. His room is a dark space enclosed by the bright room that contains the door to the outside which his wife occupies. A harsh divide between his dark, inner room and his wife's bright room that leads to the outer world creates the first small association in distinguishing between the *interior* and *exterior*. His wife's room is an area which he can safely explore as long as she isn't there, but he would be scolded for invading her space if she ever found him in it much like a mother scolding a child for playing with her personal belongings that might break in the child's uncoordinated hands. Though his wife's room is an area he is not allowed to 'play' in, the strong association that the space has with his wife gives him a feeling of comfort. He smells the scents from the various perfume bottles and asks to himself: "Which part of her body did I smell this from?" His wife, the caregiver, remains at the center of his personal perspective (Yi 13).

In later development, according to Tuan, the child begins to differentiate between the *interior* and *exterior*, or *private* and *public*. The differences experienced at first as extreme polar opposites of the "home" and "outside" (Tuan 25). Through imaginative play, the child begins to

understand spatial relations (Tuan 27). The private world of the home is essential in orienting the child and allowing a safe place for the child to test their boundaries and senses. The connections between certain actions and spaces is more clearly demarcated. For example, a playground is the place of the loudest and most active games, whereas the home is the close unit of the family and a familiar place that offers a safe refuge for imaginative development. In *Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard discusses home as “Centers of boredom, centers of solitude, centers of daydream” (Bachelard 17). This domestic space protects and nurtures human imagination and memory - “...the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (6). Orienting herself in space in relation to the caregiver, the child learns to master her own movements and develops an inner life of imagination as well in the protected space of the home. The home thus becomes the scene of a child's emergence as an independent subject.

Interesting parallels emerge when one reads Yi Sang's “The Wings” in light of Tuan's theorization. Like the infant who, unable to move freely and independently, centers the caregiver in her narrow visual and sensory perception of space, the narrator of “The Wings” is utterly dependent on his wife in the space of his home with all of his limited actions and movements dictated by his wife. He eats when she feeds him, wears what clothes she gives him, and stays in his room when she is with a “customer”. He has no agency in the exterior world of the city either. His wandering in the streets causes him to become lost and fatigued only to return home later than he planned. In this way, he is like the infant described by Tuan who centers the caregiver in her narrow visual and sensory perception of space due to the inability to move freely and independently in the space. Also like a child, this lack of agency or power stems from a lack

of money and purpose which is crucial to have autonomy over the money-and-purpose-driven capitalist space.

The anxiety the narrator feels grows when his distance from her physical body grows since she is the focal point of his perspective. When the wife entertains guests in the front half of their home while he is forced to remain quiet in the back half, his anxiety becomes especially acute because outsiders invading his home's private space have taken his caregiver away. On the nights when the guests stay late, he finds it impossible to fall asleep: "...however more deeply I may burrow into the bed, I could not fall asleep..." (Yi 17). In a similar vein, the knowledge that his wife feeds the guests elaborately while the meals she prepares for him are perfunctory at best disturbs him greatly, as though he and the guests were competing for the limited resources that the caregiver can lavish on her young.

Eventually, the uncomfortable situation leads the narrator to contemplate on the nature of what his wife does with her guests; "...I did not like the whole business, but I did not ask her any questions about it" (Yi 19). Though he pleads to be ignorant of the type of work that his wife does, there are many implications that she is paid by men for services and time that she gives to them. His contemplation is notable both for the overly bookish language in which it is presented and his failure to integrate the existing information to arrive at the obvious conclusion. Like a sleuth, the narrator pieces together the clues: "Did she have a job? I could not tell what her occupation was. If she did have a job, she did not have to go out.... she entertained many guests at home" (16). He can come to no conclusion, however: "At first, I started to research to identify my wife's occupation, but I failed to verify her vocation due to my limited knowledge of and short-sighted observations on life" (17). He knows his perspective is limited and centered around

his wife, and that his naiveté about the world does not allow him to understand what her occupation really is.

This failure of mediation between the level of sensory observation, which the narrator engages in with meticulousness, and the level of inference where the observed data should be processed but is not, becomes most acute over the problem of money. For Tuan, a child's spatial exploration and expansion lead naturally to an understanding of *property* and personal investment in objects and space (Tuan 32). This attachment is ultimately necessary in developing a “focus of value” or “source of meaning,” which I argue is *personal perspective*, or a personal equilibrium that acts as centering the point-of-view of the individual (Tuan 139). “Focus” or “meaning” acts in centering the individual's direction or goal and location both physically and metaphorically, just as perspective acts as the center of a compass. The object over which the narrator of “The Wings” puzzles is the shining coin that his wife would give him every so often to put in a small savings bank in his room. Because he does not understand the exchange value of money, he focuses exclusively on the physical thing-ness of the coin—how it feels in his hand, its thickness and shine—and at one point throws them away in the toilet. When he finds that his wife has created a new small pile of coins for him in his room, he begins to contemplate on the value of money, and comes to the conclusion that its purpose is to give pleasure. Pleasure in the act of giving the money—a pleasure that the visitors feel when they give money to his wife is the same pleasure that wife feels in giving him a small amount. The coins given to him by his wife are a kind of allowance that a mother would give a child for being good; because he stays in his room without making a fuss when the guests visit, she gives him the coins. However, at the realization of the pleasure this exchange gives, he decides to enter the exterior world for himself

- "...I could not discover it all from my research in bed alone" and so he "...wanted to learn from experience if that pleasure existed or not" (Yi 21). However, in locating the pleasure associated with money in the act of giving it away, rather than in the act of accumulating it, the narrator misunderstands the logic of capital based on money's exchange value. He thus fails to attach the "proper" meaning to objects as property.

The glimmer of curious pleasure he finds in relation to the object called money and his desire to understand his wife's attachment to it nonetheless leads him to venture outside. At the realization of the pleasure this exchange gives, he decides to enter the exterior world for himself - "...I could not discover it all from my research in bed alone" and so he "...wanted to learn from experience if that pleasure existed or not" (Yi 21). This new focus and attempt at understanding the nature of money and the pleasure it brings people follows along a child's spatial exploration and expansion in beginning to understand *property* and personal investment in objects and space (Tuan 32). This attachment is ultimately necessary in developing a "focus of value" or "source of meaning", which I argue is *personal perspective* (Tuan 139). "Focus" or "meaning" acts in centering the individual's direction or goal and location both physically and metaphorically, just as perspective does. His first venture into the outside world is completed when his wife is away. He brings along the pleasure-giving money with him but does not spend it, wandering the streets all day instead as if to test the space outside his physical limit. After nightfall, he returns home exhausted and interrupts his wife and her customer, as he passes through her space to get to his. Though his purpose in the outing was to discover the pleasure of giving money away to someone, he confesses that "I could not point out a single person out of the crowd, the one to whom I was supposed to give that money away" (Yi 24-25). Like a child who first tests her

boundaries further than the visual range of her mother, the narrator's first outing is such. Ultimately, he falls asleep from the exhaustion of the excitement of the day, but is soon awoken by his angry wife. Though she does not verbally scold him, she silently communicates her disappointment before moving back into her room. He then ventures into his wife's room, and “falling over her bedding quilt, [he] fished out the money from [his] pocket and crushed it into her hand” (25). He falls unconscious in his wife's bed and wakes to her absence, but with the gained knowledge that money gives joy to its spender on the one hand and the wish to spend again on the other. He thus understands the power of money as the power to assert one's wishes. Putting the money in his wife's hand allowed him to spend the night in the hitherto forbidden space of her room; the next night again, the narrator returns home from a day of aimless wandering in the city so that he could give his wife money and be allowed to spend the night with her.

Like the figure of an infant who begins to explore her space, the narrator does so as well with the figure of his wife as his center of perspective. He begins to understand the importance of having an attachment to an object, in this case, money. This attachment enables the growth of feelings of power in exerting one's own will and wishes upon someone else; though it is an exchange the spender is the person who receives the most joy in the position of power of demanding one's will. The spender has more power in having the most desired and universal object—money—whereas the receiver has an object or service that would not necessarily be desired by all. Money is the means by which one gains agency and power over space. As Tuan has argued, “sense of self, whether individual or collective, grows out of the exercise of power” (175). Whereas the narrator had been confined to a small back bedroom where he lays inert like

an invalid or child, unable to cross the barrier of his wife's room to go outside without interrupting her work and warranting her scolding, it is money that allows him to make the passage between not only the inner and outer halves of the domestic space, but between the private space of the home and the public space of the city.

Though he knows only money allows for this passage, he is unable to take on the position of a subject as a consumer. On the roof of the Mitsukoshi Department store, an import from Japan, the narrator stands looking down at the people below – a position that allows him a clear view of the scene and thinks “They could not free themselves from the glue—the invisible tangle of threads shackling them” (Yi 38). Despite his awareness of the “tangle,” he is also entrapped and cannot escape. Right after he observes the scene: “Suddenly, I stopped to think. Where was I now going?” (39). He is caught in the contradictions of the colonial modern space and cannot transcend the space and grow the wings he wishes to grow to fly.

KIM SŬNG-OK'S “SEOUL: 1964, WINTER”: SMOOTH AND STRIATED SPACE

If the dramatization of the narrator’s failure to properly navigate the relationship between public and private spaces in “The Wings” paves the way for a trenchant critique of capitalist modernity in colonial Korea, then Kim Sŭng-ok's “Seoul: 1964, Winter” attests to the promised freedom in the new political space that opened up after the April 19 Revolution of 1960, only to be closed a year later by Park Chung-hee’s military coup d’état on May 16, 1961. The momentum for revolution started building in 1957 as civic unrest over Syngman Rhee’s failure to bolster the economy spread when the United States began reducing its economic aid (Jager 278-279). The first President of South Korea who came to power in a divided election in 1948 and who

remained in power through the Korean War and the anticommunist consolidation of the postwar state in the South, Syngman Rhee began to take drastic measures to re-assert his power against the opposition. He amended the National Security Law to increase the reach of the government's power, but dissatisfaction only spread when Rhee was voted the president for yet another term in 1960 after the convenient deaths of his political opponents Cho Pong-am and Cho Pyŏng-ok.

Riding on the wave of the rising discontent, students from Korea University in Seoul organized a demonstration on April 18 calling for a new election. When the peaceful demonstrators were attacked by Rhee's supporters, the protest spread. On the historic date of April 19, 1960, thousands of students from high schools, universities and even junior high schools, marched to the political center, Kyeongmudae, and demanded Rhee's resignation. Hundreds were killed after police opened fire and many more were wounded before martial law was declared. Ultimately, Rhee could not reconcile with the Korean citizens and resigned at the end of the same month to be replaced by his hand-picked Vice President, Lee Ki-poong but he and his whole family committed suicide on April 28 and on May 16, 1961 General Park Chung-hee launched his coup to begin his autocratic rule.

The atmosphere between the demonstrations of April 19 and the coup of May 16 of the following year was a volatile one, but one that held much promise for a new future for South Koreans, namely, a democratic future with a leader who is chosen by the people and who represents the people's interests. Citizens, and especially students, not only expressed their discontent and called for reforms, but witnessed the direct effect that their voice had on the government. Democracy became the call for the emergence of the free individual as a subject and as an agent of change in political space.

This liberal emphasis on the individual as a political subject and the promise of freedom within the newly established public space, however, had a short lifespan. Even though Park Chung-hee initially presented his military junta as the rightful heir to the revolutionary spirit of April 19, it soon became apparent that his plan to establish an “independent economy” (*charip kyŏngje*) (Kim 19) would not prioritize individual freedom and personal enterprise, but “anti-communist ‘guided capitalism’” imposed by the state (Kim, Clark 25). June, 1964 marked the launch of the First Five-Year Economic Development Plan. Under the great mobilization campaigns of the developmentalist state, individuals were to be bonded to the national whole, moving inexorably in the direction dictated by the state. In order for the Korean nation to emerge as autonomous at the head of an “independent economy,” individual autonomy was to be sacrificed. The promise of the individual as a free political subject that was the legacy of the April 19 Revolution went unfulfilled in the highly regulated and mobilized capitalist development pursued by the Park regime. It is precisely in this space between the revolution and its betrayal that we can locate “Seoul: 1964, Winter,” the most famous short story written by Kim Sŭng-ok.

Kim’s story, which takes place in the space of a single night during the winter of 1964 in the city of Seoul, is told by “a twenty-five-year old country boy” who “was now working in the military affairs section of a ward office” (Pihl 165). He happens to meet in a drinking tent a graduate student of the same age by the name of An, a man who is clearly from a more privileged socioeconomic background. Despite the difference in their backgrounds, the two young men strike up a conversation and realize they have something in common. They both have a strange fascination in becoming absolute observers by not exerting control in changing the space;

observers that notice small, transient details of life anchored to particular spaces of the city that are liable to go unnoticed by others. They are then joined by another man in the drinking tent who offers his money in order to spend some time with the two younger men, a proposition to which they reluctantly agree. This leads them on a strange whirlwind journey through the city, mediated by the older man's money, and punctuated by pauses at such public establishments as a Chinese restaurant, a training school for beauticians engulfed in flames, and a motel. The older man has no intention of saving this money since he got it after selling his wife's corpse to the hospital for medical research, and spends the night with the younger men burning through his money, both figuratively and literally. After these wanderings, the men end the night in a motel in separate rooms. The two younger men wake up to the news that the older man has committed suicide. This news causes no emotional responses; with a quick word of parting, the two twentysomethings are absorbed into the space of Seoul once again, as if their encounter had never happened.

In analyzing how the urban space unfolds in Kim's story, I am inspired by the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in particular their insight in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* that capitalism creates a *striated space* (Deleuze and Guattari). In this story, space is established through movement and pause but these actions take place within the construct of the space as a *striated* one. This is a theory of capitalistic space established by Deleuze and Guattari in which, for the sake of efficiency, space is broken up and pathways are placed for the sole purpose of reaching a goal. In the short story, the characters are at a loss of where to go after visiting a Chinese restaurant together: "But we hadn't any place to go. Beside the Chinese restaurant we had just left was the show window of a men's clothing store. The man

pointed toward it and then dragged us inside the shop” (Pihl 174). This story takes place in the beginning of the Park Chung-hee presidency which promised re-development of the city and the emphasis of an independent economy. A re-developing of space and ideals that promised a new freedom of movement for the liberated individual and a new subjectivity. Movement takes two specific forms; these forms adhere to whether the movement itself is goal-orientated or fluid and unfocused and pause interrupts either type of movement for the purpose of re-orientation and change in direction. The breaking down of movement in these two categories closely follows the power of capitalism to make all useful movement happen only in accordance with a goal. It is a means to an end and a process of production to reach an end product. This kind of striated space was linked closely to Park Chung-hee's emphasis on economic plans and the sacrifice expected by all South Koreans in order for these developments to occur. Smooth space is the opposite of striated space and so stresses purposeless movement of the individual – an environment that favors the individual rather than the economy. So the smooth space is like the space of the April Revolution; a time where the individual's voice was heard and individual subjectivity exerted a visible impact on the political space around them.

My reading of Kim's story uses this framework of striated and smooth space to chart the movement of the two main characters, and to link their movement to the political economy of the post-revolutionary moment in South Korea's 1960s. and I argue that this work can be read as a requiem of the revolutionary space in the false promise of liberation. The characters seemingly have freedom in the space as subjects, capable of authoring their own movements in ways contrary to the striations of the politico-economic logic, but this freedom amounts in the end to small manipulations of movement incapable of altering the spatial logic in significant ways.

Moreover, the subject-position that the two young men seek is only available to them as observers rather than actors. A human-centered, *smooth* space turns out to be already contained by the striated space. Smooth space is the opposite of striated space and so stresses purposeless movement of the individual – an environment that favors the individual rather than the economy.

Central to the operation of space in Kim's story is the idea of pause and movement. This idea is first introduced in the discussion between An and the narrator in the drinking tent. They begin to talk about enjoying things that “wiggle”; the narrator elaborates that he loves the gentle way a girl's belly wiggles as she breathes, a movement one can observe only when pushed extremely close to her on a crowded bus. He says, “I love that movement with a passion” (Pihl 167). That movement is a very human movement, and a very directionless movement in the way the girl's stomach wiggles – a movement like a vibration that does not follow a straight path. So it is a movement akin to the human-centered smooth space rather than the capitalistic striated space. After this initial confession which establishes the two men as *simpatico*, they begin to talk more intimately about private moments connected to specific places in Seoul. For example, the narrator tells An “There are two chocolate wrappers in the first trash can in the alley next to the Tansöngsa Theater” and when An asks him for the exact time when this observation was made, the narrator furnishes the specific time as well (168). It is recognized by An as a valid detail and prompts him to divulge his own individually perceived details of space and time. These details mark pauses in one's movement through the city, but these are pauses that do not conform to purposeful action recognizable by the logic of development or mobilization. In its utter triviality and uselessness, the experience of the space becomes singular, individual, unrepeatable. The two men recognize value in that experience precisely because it would be considered to have no

monetary or educational value. This connection is felt as a kind of ownership. When An and the narrator compete in their individually perceived details, An acknowledges the narrator's experience by saying: "That fact is entirely your property alone, Kim *hyong*" (169). The very vocabulary used in talking about it is one of property and ownership. An interesting moment occurs later when the three men are watching a burning building and An says: "That fire isn't yours, Kim *hyong*, it's not mine, and it's not this man's. It's just our common property now. But a fire doesn't go on forever. Therefore, I find no interest in fires" (175). It is a private ownership, an individually perceived concrete detail that gives a meaning to the characters, orienting their perspective of space. The ownership of small details—individually perceived small and seemingly meaningless details of the space and time—comforts them by allowing them to lift themselves up from the anonymity of the city.

Such re-valuation of space and experience takes place in Kim's story against the backdrop of a city where the barrier between the private and public is increasingly breaking down. That is to say, actions previously attached to private spaces are now occurring in public spaces. For example, the three characters meet at a drinking stall, a "pub on wheels" meant to allow easy dismantling and transportation, as opposed to a bar in a permanent building: "Actually, a liquor stall like this was meant just for people who thought they might stop for a glass on the way home; it wasn't the place to be drinking and chatting with the man standing next to you" (Pihl p166). From the liquor stall, they make their way to a Chinese restaurant in which they hear a couple having sex in the next room, as though the restaurant was standing in for a motel or inn. They then move through the night streets, and after witnessing various scenes, end the night at an inn instead of returning home. It is in this transitory place that the older widowed

man commits suicide. Taken together, these spaces are of utmost importance in helping us to see the relationship between the public and private in Kim's story. Unexpected pauses that suspend movement, not in permanent structures that secure the separation between the public and private, but in transitory spaces that blur the separation disturb the established pattern of movement and allow the characters to orientate themselves anew.

The unexpected pause, moreover, is a class equalizer, since it enables encounters between people from different backgrounds who would not meet in a goal-oriented trajectory. The narrator and An embrace this movement as a kind of freedom and relish in their ability to navigate the transitory spaces of Seoul's ever-changing landscape. They do not look for lasting human relationships to anchor them or offer them solace. Instead, they content themselves with their absolute ownership of a fleeting detail preserved in the freeze-frame of their singular and unique memory.

The older widowed man is the personage in the story who especially cannot function in this space with the knowledge of the meaningless anonymity and transience. He looks for human connections in order to overcome this anxiety, and so tries to form a friendship with An and the narrator; but he is too different from them. His wish for a real human connection and comfort is absent in the goals of the two younger men. Since he ultimately cannot accept the temporality of the space and function within it and also is unable to form a human connection to give himself solace, he commits suicide in the inn. Human relationships are what give him solace, but with his wife dead and the lack of any family or friends in Seoul, he must reorient his goals if he is to live. He cannot do so and sticks to his consolation in human relationships. The widower doesn't wish to be abandoned by the boys and even asks them to share a room at the inn: "Just stay with

me for tonight. I beg of you. Please come along with me,' the man said, grabbing and tugging at my arm..." (177). The boys deny his wish since they do not look for the same solace in human relations that he does. Ultimately, the absence of such consolation results in inability to navigate the spaces of Seoul and his suicide. The two young characters - the student, An, and the narrator - embrace this movement as a kind of freedom and this ability enables them to exist in the transitory space of the ever-changing landscape of Seoul. Unlike the widower, they do not look for human relationships as anchors that offer them solace and self-orientation. Instead, they content themselves and even relish the formation of imaginary anchors to the transitory space itself; these anchors to the space are imaginary in that the characters themselves realize that the spaces are not permanent. However, the ownership of small details - individually perceived small and seemingly meaningless details of the space and time - comforts them by allowing them to lift themselves up from the anonymity of the city. It establishes a special connection to the space by seeing something that others haven't. This connection is felt as a kind of ownership. When An and the narrator compete in their individually perceived details, An acknowledges the narrator's experience by saying: "That fact is entirely your property alone, Kim *hyong*" (169). The very vocabulary used in talking about it is one of property and ownership. An interesting moment occurs later when the three men are watching a burning building and An says: "That fire isn't yours, Kim *hyong*, it's not mine, and it's not this man's. It's just our common property now. But a fire doesn't go on forever. Therefore, I find no interest in fires" (175). It is a private ownership, an individually perceived concrete detail that gives a meaning to the characters, orienting their perspective of space.

In the characters' ability to move through the city space and accept its temporality, they

attempt to change the striated space into a smooth, human-centered space. However, like the promise of liberalism and emphasis of the individual subjectivity in the revolutionary space ending with the Park Chung-hee presidency, it is a action within the striated space and in terms that cannot be divorced from it. Pauses that the two young men take are pauses that are both preceded and followed by purposeful movement. They are not really free in the space and their cynicism reflects that. It would be useful to think again about the moment they leave the Chinese restaurant and they all ask the same question: “Where shall we go?” only to end up shopping for neckties in the store next door (Pihl p174). Proper movement is directly attached to consumerism and the only acceptable path is the one punctuated by spending; free subjectivity is an impossibility.

KIM YÖNG-HA'S “MOVING”: THE UNCANNY SPACE OF NEOLIBERALISM

Kim Yöng-ha’s 2004 story, “Moving,” traces the misadventures of a young couple as they move from one apartment to another. If Seoul becomes the stage for a colonial intellectual’s crisis of subjectivity in Yi Sang’s “The Wings,” and the backdrop for the post-revolutionary aesthetic of disillusionment in Kim Sŭng-ok’s “Seoul: 1964, Winter,” Kim Yöng-ha’s “Moving” takes us into the city at the heart of Korea’s late capitalist or neoliberal political economy. And at the heart of this heart lies the space of the apartment. For this reason, I will begin this section with a brief overview of the central role apartment-building and apartment-ownership have played in the history of South Korean economic development before going on to analyze how Kim’s story fetishizes the space of the apartment in order precisely to critique that history.

How did In order to read the work as such, it is important to discuss the political economy following the Korean War and Park Chung-hee's presidency which saw a huge boom in

the apartment constructing business. Considering this story is written after the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, it is also important to understand the effect that this had on the capitalist environment in the replacing of space rather than money as the ultimate currency that offered the greatest chance of return, power and stability.

Kim Yŏng-ha's "Moving" was written in 2004 and is set in apartments become normative for Seoulites, both as the space of residence and as a means of climbing the economic ladder? Real estate speculation and the shortage of living spaces was an outcome of a number of factors that have their roots in the immediate aftermath of the Korean War. The Korean War devastated the city of Seoul, which naturally led to a huge housing shortage that needed to be quickly rectified due to the continuing increase of population in the capital. Apartment housing was proposed as a cheap, fast and space-saving method of solving the issue, and the first apartment building was built in 1958 (Jeong 90). The population of Seoul grew even more rapidly during Park Chung-hee's presidency, spurred on by Park's industrialization policy which sought to create a large urban labor pool in order to keep wages low. Apartments became an integral part of Park regime's industrialization and urbanization program. In 1962, President Park Chung-hee enacted his "Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development" which provided a blueprint for urban renewal projects. By the mid 1970s, the government enticed 55 construction companies to build apartment complexes and by the 80s there was a large real estate market for apartments as commodities (Jeong 91).

More than a simple solution to the problem of overpopulation, real estate development centered on apartments was a means for developers to lock in huge profits (Jeong 91). Due to regulations that encouraged the building of apartments, the "difference between the controlled

price and the market price on the larger apartments was bigger than that on the small ones, while construction cost per square meter of an apartment decreased with increase of its size” (91). For those Koreans who were able to buy apartments, real estate speculation became a means of climbing the economic ladder. The value of an apartment lay not simply, or even primarily, in the living space it afforded its residents in the present, but the prospect for upward mobility it offered. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, the rise in apartment prices made it possible for apartment owners to make huge gains on their purchases, leading some Koreans to buy apartments larger than what they needed in order to sell them and buy even larger spaces (99). After the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, the real estate market offered even more promise in economic security due to ever-increasing space shortages and population migration to Seoul.

These space shortages lead to the fetishization of space in two ways: through “extending the functionality of each space” and “emphasizing the independence of each space” (Jeong 101). Both of these result from the capitalist focus on productivity and efficiency and the neoliberalist ideals that followed along with this kind of capitalism in South Korea; all citizens who work hard deserve their own personal space and this space should also be a productive one.

In order for this space to be most effective, they are mostly designed as a “tree-shaped spatial structure” in which “only one path exists between the two spaces within a housing unit” (Jeong 95). This path is the hallway that connects the door leading to the outside and running through the center of the apartment and into the living room or kitchen area with all other subsequent living spaces being doors along this hallway, like branches off a sturdy tree. This follows the style that capitalism dictates argued by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. These apartments are arborescent and striated spaces following an “arborescent

system[s]” “along preestablished paths” (Deleuze, Guattari 16).

Apartments are the ultimate fetishized object in Seoul. South Korea's economy has developed to the point where private space is the most scarce, and therefore the most expensive and sought after. Apartments have become a means to an end, but an end that is thought of in terms of exchange value rather than use value. Rather than the value of money—which does not normally fluctuate dramatically—the value of the apartment space has a much greater return value and has become an investment many Koreans hope to have. Apartments both address the issue of spacial shortages by selling homes in the sky rather than land and perfectly encapsulate the ideology of the neoliberal economy. The neoliberal economy that stresses the individual also stresses the private space of the individual in which subjectivity and agency are promised by establishing an identity and point of stabilization and re-orientation for the resident.

With this understanding of the political economy in relation to Korean apartment culture and the developmental idealism of the Park Chung-hee era as well as the theoretical framework of Lefebvre in understanding the fetishization of commodity, the narrative of the story can then be analyzed. The story opens with Jin-su and his wife preparing to move to a larger apartment from their first newlywed abode, after saving for a few years. They have outgrown the space though the size of their family has not grown; they have accumulated objects that have made the small space feel even smaller. After a suggestion from his friend, Jin-su hires a moving company which offers the service of packing up all the belongings, moving them to the new apartment and unpacking as well as organizing them. Though the company advertises that the residents can literally go on a vacation while the company takes care of every aspect of the move for them, the couple decides to be there to oversee the safety of their objects in the hands of the movers, who

are, after all, strangers. They are especially anxious about a certain antique piece of pottery that Jin-su purchased at a bargain; Jin-su suspects that the vase was a product of an illegal grave-digging operation, though the suspicion does not stop him from acquiring the stolen artifact. Despite the couple's insistence that the pottery be handled with extra caution, the pottery is destroyed in a move gone terribly awry. At the end of the story, Jin-su goes back to his old apartment to look for the pottery and finds it shattered by a flowerbed. He pockets a shard and takes it to their new apartment with an odd sense of foreboding that it too will fill up with objects in no time at all, objects that will crowd them out of the very space that they call home.

At stake in my reading of "Moving" is the question of subjectivity as it is played out in relation to objects. Kim's story locates us in a city where "who you are" has been equated to "what you own." It is in possession of property that one emerges as a recognizable subject in the late capitalist economy of Seoul. And yet, as the accumulation of objects becomes the sole purpose of the characters' lives, the property that is supposed to guarantee the subject's place turns into the very thing that compromises the promise of agency and free will. (In an uncanny inversion, the objects gain power over the subjects. The possessions crowd out the possessor in the apartment space. In a striking formulation that alludes to this inverted relationship between the possessor and the possession, the ancient Gaya pottery is presented as being possessed by the ghost of an ancient scholar, visible only to Jin-su's wife.

Such an inversion of subject-object relations is mapped over the space of the apartment as well. At its most basic level, the apartment is supposed to be a private dwelling, a place over which the couple has complete ownership and control. While the chaotic world outside can often leave them feeling disoriented—Jin-su's wife goes so far feeling disorientation physically,

suffering “from vertigo every time she walked down the stairs”—only the couple’s goals matter in their apartment, only their goals matter. No one or nothing interferes with their movements, literally and metaphorically, as the couple maintains full autonomy over a completely self-centered world. This is the main reason why the couple constantly wishes to increase the size of this space because having complete control over as large a space as possible is seen as giving them more spatial freedom.

The private space of the home is also understood as a projection of the self. While going through old items in their apartment, for example, Jin-su's wife asks him, "Do you ever think that a person's house looks like the inside of his head?" Jin-su thinks to himself in response, “The objects representing deteriorating functions in his brain were fittingly covered in dust in his home: a high school math reference book popped out of nowhere, looking as if it would disintegrate if touched, as well as an old manual camera that he couldn't remember exactly how to work.” The physical space of the home is thus closely linked to the inner space of the characters’ minds in the narrative.

Kim’s story, however, undermines this assumed mastery over the apartment space in a number of different ways. The first is the introduction of outsiders. When faced with the idea of strangers coming into their home and touching their things, even if only in the process of moving, Jin-su grows extremely anxious. “What if someone steals something?” Jin-su asks his friend. He is threatened by the disturbance of his private space, since this space is so deeply connected to his private self. Later, when the movers come to do their job, their entrance is represented literally as desecrating a sort of sanctity of the couple's private space: the man in charge of the move, simply signified as “the guy in the yellow vest,” walks into the home with

his shoes on: “His basketball shoes left clear footprints on the floor, which the couple had been mopping for five years.” The space that was previously their own is suddenly vulnerable and the temporality of the space is laid bare to the couple's eyes to their extreme discomfort by the changes exerted on it by the movers in their scuffing of the floors. Rather than complying to the couple's wishes, the man in the yellow vest damages the apartment floor with carelessness, and brushes off Jin-su's concerns rudely: “You think this cheap vinyl floor's gonna last you tens of thousands of years?” The couple lose their power over the space of their home and find themselves at the mercy of the movers when they realize that they will have a hard time finding other movers. The presence of outsiders in the private space of the apartment turn it into a strangely foreign space.

Similarly to the characters in “Seoul: 1964, Winter”, the characters in “Moving” also anchor themselves in space in the thought that somehow space, though it be temporal, offers up a longer-lasting and more stable anchor than using human relations as a compass to orient the self. The couple is suspicious of the interaction they have with the movers and at no point try to make a connection with them. They are too defensive of their space to talk properly with the movers, the main mover says to the couple “Huh, you people, you're strange. I ask what this is and you get mad without even answering my question. I guess you think I'd do something bad to this, right?” The couples objectify the movers as commodities – they are there as service workers that they have purchased and not as human subjects to exert their own will over the space. So they are uncomfortable when the movers show signs of their humanity, or subjectivity. It would be more convenient for the couple if all of them were deaf like the Korean-Chinese mover who works and cannot talk back. After the man in the yellow vest tells Jin-su the story about the Thai

mover who died during a move in which he sat on the stuff which was slowly lowered by the giant ladder down to the ground and was blown off by a gust of wind, Jin-su thinks to himself "*Yes, please don't die. At least until after the move is completed*"; he is more concerned about the objects that he owns and their being safely transported to the new apartment than he is about the life of the movers. Ultimately they place the most value in anchoring their perspective to space and the objects within the space rather than human relations. Even when faced with the reality of the transitory quality of the space and the fact that their *private* space isn't as private as they thought, they simply transfer their anchoring attachment onto another object or space to orient themselves. This is where the interesting quality of the ancient Gaya pot comes in. They, and especially Jin-su, are attached to the pot because it is something they completely own and have command over and it is an object that has defied time in its survival. Owning such an object allows the couple to overcome time and own a kind of permanence that they can then center their perspective around. Though Jin-su protected the pot adamantly in repeatedly telling the movers to be careful of the pot, the pot breaks; but the breaking of the pot does not completely break his sense of perspective. He still hangs onto some sense of ownership and the ultimate value it offers. Finding the shards of the broken pot, "Jin-su went into the flowerbed, put a piece in his pocket, and started home."

Finally, the story complicates the relationship between ownership and subjectivity. Though these promises of property are also a promise in anchoring the individual's perspective by being a physical manifestation of the subject's identity by giving them an address – a location they directly associate to for both legal and personal purposes, the characters do not have true agency in the space. The objects and apartment space constrict the movement of the subject and

do not allow for deviation from the striated space of the capitalist society. Far from presenting a private haven away from the capitalist logic of the city outside, the apartment becomes an internalization of its logic. While the characters in “Seoul: 1964, Winter” were able to move and pause in a manner contrary to the dominant order, pause in “Moving” is seen as a mere stasis rather than an act of resistance. There is no outside to the logic of upward economic mobility, understood as securing a larger and larger living space and claiming ownership over more and more objects.

In this story, space is also established through movement and pause. The very title of the story is “Moving”: this movement represents the ability to effectively function and navigate Seoul in the sense that it is a movement that allows them to improve their economic standing. In this story, movement can be literally understood as a physical navigation through space, but also carries the more nuanced value of movement representing societal movement and economic improvement. What is most interesting is that there is no boundary or difference in these movements; the ability to move in the space is the ability to move up in economic standing. This is the cause for such happiness for Jin-su and his wife in being able to move from their small, 17-*pyeong* apartment to the more spacious 30-*pyeong* apartment. Their current, 17-*pyeong* home was never meant to be permanent for the couple, but only a pause in the upward-movement of obtaining a larger space: "This 30-*pyeong* apartment would allow them to realize their humble old dream of lying on the sofa and watching TV."

However, this movement that is linked with economic mobility inverts the relationship between the subject and object. Emphasis is placed on the obtaining of more and more objects. For example, the wife strategically buys their new sofa and tables over a period of three days in

order to reap all the benefits of added incentives such as a rechargeable vacuum cleaner, dining ware, and an electric teakettle. The wife calls this strategy of receiving free gifts as “the wisdom of life.” It is not only expected, but extremely shrewd and buying real estate is no different. Hence the excitement the couple feels at finally moving to a larger place after saving up. In the end, Jin-su brings home a useless and broken shard of the Gaya pot only to wrap it up in newspaper and put it in a dresser drawer. Like a man possessed by a ghost, he protects the objects and his apartment above all else and loses true subjectivity and agency in the space.

CONCLUSION

Through a theoretically informed reading of three literary explorations of the city of Seoul—Yi Sang’s “The Wings,” Kim Sŭng-ok’s “Seoul: 1964, Winter,” and Kim Yŏng-ha’s “Moving”—this thesis has attempted to trace how a crisis of subjectivity becomes spatialized in key junctures of Korean history. Even though this narrative comes to an end in the first half of the 2000s, the city of Seoul has continued its ceaseless metamorphosis in the decade since, generating new spatial anxieties and new crises of subjectivity. In lieu of a conventional conclusion, then, I would like to bring one such site into focus by drawing on my own personal experience, and ask whether the insights of this thesis can shed light on the more contemporary relations that structure spatial experience in the city of Seoul today.

That site is called *goshiwon*. I called it my home in 2014, when I spent a year as an exchange student in Seoul. A small room available to rent on a monthly basis, *goshiwon* often comes without a private bathroom and is generally as small as a closet. It is the cheapest and the most flexible form of housing in a country that requires key money, or deposit money, for a more

permanent living space. This key money, or *bojeung-geum* in Korean, is a large sum of money that the renter pays to the landlord as a kind of security deposit that will be returned when moving out (if the apartment is in an acceptable state). If there is still a monthly rent, then this key money can be anywhere from two to three times the monthly rent rate. Otherwise, this key money is paid in lieu of monthly rent and is at least half of the property's total value. *Goshiwon* bypasses this custom. Precisely because it is flexible, temporary, and cheap, *goshiwon* has become a place to stay for foreign sojourners in Seoul like me, though it originally came into being as a distraction-free housing option for Koreans preparing for the civil service examinations. It has also become home to some of the most vulnerable segments of society within South Korea's polarized neoliberal economy: migrant workers and part-timers who do not have family to rely on as a social safety net.

Even though *goshiwon* was all I could afford on my small student budget, I would never willingly live there again. I felt imprisoned in the space and deprived of a place of refuge; as dramatic as it sounds it was the closest I have ever felt to being homeless. There was no real stability, comfort or feelings of safety in that small room. I spent my days and nights quietly as if in a vow of silence after being warned by the owner that the walls were thin and he expected me to respect my neighbor. Never did I see this neighbor, but I heard her only through the thin walls whenever she made phone calls: calls to her boyfriend who seemed too busy to meet despite her cute charms, calls to her friends about how hungry she is but how much she wants to diet, and calls to a Chinese restaurant to order *jajangmyun* late at night. After an unpleasant chance encounter in the kitchen with a male boarder who thought that making obvious sexual advances would win him a date, I further lost the comfort of cooking homemade meals and resorted to

always eating outside. The importance of a stable and comfortable abode for my overall well-being was never so clear. But as prison-like as it was, the room also became my refuge. Like the narrator in “The Wings,” I had moments when I retreated into my small, dark room, venturing out only to buy absolute necessities like food. Though I hated the room, it was still the only place I could curl up and hide away from the world like returning to the protective womb of my mother. When this became stifling, I forced myself out of my private space and looked for attachments to public space to feel familiar, seeking feelings of security and permanence paradoxically in the public spaces of the city – certain streets, cafés, and restaurants.

But despite my antipathy for it, *goshiwon* became a part of my identity throughout that year in Korea. I learned what it feels like to be equated to the place you call home. In Seoul, it often seemed to me that you are not what you eat, as the conventional saying goes in America; instead, you are where you live. Whenever I met a new person, one of the first questions I would be asked was: Where do you live? Anyone who asked this question clearly did not expect me to give my exact mailing address, but the questions did not completely stop after I divulged my neighborhood. It was followed with: Do you live in a dormitory or apartment? Most of the time, I openly stated that, actually, I lived in a *goshiwon*. The reaction was always the same: a mix of pity and concern which I met with a smile and a description of just how small and prison-like my room was. It was as though I had become *goshiwon*.

At times *goshiwon* would seem to me a living thing..., the *goshiwon* had an uncanny and frightening control over my sense of well-being and identity. I would like to say that the experience broke my protective shell and made me a more social person, but that would not be true. Instead, I avoided the outside world as much as I could – I felt both stifled and ugly living

in that space. Only the end of the winter resting period and beginning of the second semester drew me out of this mood that had enveloped me like the rough blanket in my room. As I packed my bags to return to the United States after finishing my year abroad, the room was the only thing I left without any regret. Though I walked away from the room a changed person, the room stayed the same.

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